

Cleft Care: Expressing and pumping

Feeding your baby with a cleft palate

Babies born with a cleft palate often find it difficult to create the suction to breastfeed. This happens because air escapes through the gap in the roof of the mouth, which makes suction harder. Our resource [Cleft Care – Feeding your baby](#) provides more information about feeding your baby with a cleft.

The priorities are that your baby:

- gets enough milk
- grows well
- feels safe and loved.

Breastfeeding and bonding before surgery

Breastfeeding is about more than nutrition. It is also about comfort, connection and closeness. Skin-to-skin contact and time at the breast can help build your milk supply. If your baby is unable to feed from the breast, you can still share meaningful breastfeeding moments.

You can:

- enjoy skin-to-skin cuddles
- let your baby nuzzle at the breast
- offer comfort feeds at the breast
- use gentle touch, eye contact and your voice.



Choosing a pump

A hospital-grade or double electric pump is usually best, especially in the early weeks while establishing your milk supply. Double pumping means pumping both breasts at the same time.

Double pumping:

- empties the breasts more fully
- helps protect your milk supply
- saves time.

Some parents also use wearable pumps. They may not empty the breasts as well as hospital-grade pumps, but they can be helpful when you need to move around.

A qualified lactation consultant can help you choose what suits you best.

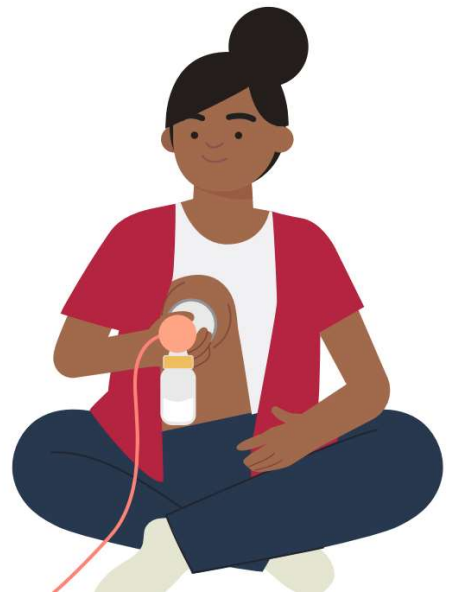


How often to pump

To build and maintain your milk supply, most parents are encouraged to:

- express at least 7 times in 24 hours
- pump about every 3 hours during the day
- pump about every 4 hours overnight
- include at least one pump between 12am and 6am.

Milk-making hormones are highest overnight. Pumping at this time can help your supply.



Understanding milk supply

It is normal for your milk supply to change across the day and night. There are many factors that affect milk supply. Many parents worry that their supply is dropping after a few weeks. Often, this is just your hormones settling into a steady pattern.

The amount of milk you see in the bottle is only one moment in time. It doesn't always show how much milk your body can make. Some parents find it helpful not to watch the bottle while pumping.

If you are worried about your supply, please reach out for support.

Tips from other cleft parents

Caring for a baby with a cleft often includes:

- pumping
- feeding with a special bottle
- burping
- cleaning the pump and bottle parts.

Some parents find it helpful to:

- set up a “pump station” with water, snacks, and a phone charger
- prepare bottles and pump parts ahead of time
- use hands-free pumps when safe and suitable.

Finding your feeding path

Every family's feeding journey is different. There is no single 'right' way to feed a baby with a cleft.

Some families choose to:

- express breastmilk and bottle-feed until palate repair
- combine breastfeeding moments with expressed breastmilk bottle feeds
- use formula feeds
- use a mix of breastmilk and formula feeds.

Feeding your baby, whether by breast, bottle, expressed milk, or formula is about love, nourishment, and connection. What matters most is that your baby is fed, loved, and growing well, and that you feel supported in your choices. The best feeding plan is the one that works for your baby and your family.



Caring for yourself through this journey

If you feel pain when pumping or feeding, seek help immediately from your Child Health Nurse, a qualified lactation consultant or your cleft team.

Feeling sad, frustrated, or disappointed is common. It does not mean you are failing. You are adapting to something unexpected.

Some parents find it helpful to talk with a health professional or psychologist if they are feeling low, stressed, or overwhelmed. We encourage you to contact your GP, Child Health Nurse, a qualified lactation consultant, or your cleft team anytime for support.

Useful support and resources

- Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) breastfeeding.asn.au
- your Child Health Nurse
- a qualified lactation consultant
- Cleft PALS WA for peer support and connection with other families cleftpalswa.org.au
- PCH Cleft team for feeding, growth and equipment advice.

Cleft Care team contacts

If you ever have concerns about feeding, growth, or hydration, please contact your cleft or feeding team for support.

Clinical nurse specialist

Phone: (08) 6456 8132

Speech Pathology

Phone: (08) 6456 0414

Cleft administration

Phone: (08) 6456 4380

Email: PCH.PlasticsCNS@health.wa.gov.au



Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service



Child and Adolescent Health Service

15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.

Telephone: (08) 6456 2222

Produced by: Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

Ref: 1971 © CAHS March 2026

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for people with disability.

Disclaimer: This publication is for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for medical advice.

© State of Western Australia, Child and Adolescent Health Service.

